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ALLIES OR PARTNERS? AN APPRAISAL OF TURKEY'S TIES TO RUSSIA, 1991-2007

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Turkey's ties to Russia have received considerable attention in the recent past. Since the end of the Cold War scholars, observers and policy-makers have shed lots of ink trying to make sense of various aspects of the ties between Turkey and Russia. (Bazoğlu Sezer, 1997, 2000, 2001; Gül 2004; Ogan 2004, 2006; Akgün and Aydın 1999; Tellal 2001; Sever 2001; Selçuk 2005; Kazgan 1998; Efegil 2001; Trenin 1997; Bilge 1997; Kınıklıoğlu 2001, 2006; Kazgan and Ulçenko 2003; Nadein-Ravesky 1999; Warhola and Mitchell 2006; Aktürk 2006; Hill 2003; Hill and Taşpınar 2006a; Hill and Taşpınar 2006b). While, in the late 1990s, some of these scholars and observers used terms such as "cold peace," (Bilge 1997: 92) and "schizophrenic," (Trenin 1997: 57) to describe the relations between the two countries, and "ruled out any strategic normalization between Moscow and Ankara in the medium term" (Allison 1999: 36), in the early 2000s, the term that was used to describe the ties between the two countries was "virtual rapprochement," (Bazoğlu Sezer 2001: 62) indicating the thawing ice. Recently, in 2005, however, Russia was accused of launching "a little-noticed charm offensive" (Holbrooke, 2005) towards Turkey, and then, Turkey and Russia were credited for joining forces and shifting towards "Eurasianism" (Salhani, 2005) and forming an "axis of the excluded" (Hill and Taşpınar 2006b) highlighting the possibility of a creation of a "quasi-alliance" between Turkey and Russia. It is true that the relations between Turkey and Russia have improved immensely, but can we talk of "quasi-alliances," "axes" or "couplings" between the two?

This article is an overview of factors, mostly from a Turkish perspective, that changed the nature of ties between Turkey and Russia since the collapse of the Soviet Union. It argues that the improvement of these ties is a "dual normalization," and can be attributed to three overlapping developments: diminishing of the factors that elevated levels of mutual threat perception in Turkey and Russia; Russia's emergence as a

profitable market for Turkish entrepreneurs as well as the Turkish elite's drive to make Turkey an energy hub; and, Vladimir Putin's goal to make foreign economic relations one of the priority areas in Russian foreign policy. In other words, the economic "normalization" began a long time ago, but political "normalization" had to wait for the diminishing of the threat perceptions present in both countries.

The paper unfolds in three parts. The first section following this introduction elaborates on the events that contributed to the increasing threat perceptions in Russia and Turkey, and how the disappearance of these issues from the agenda has changed threat perceptions in both countries. The second section examines the dynamics of the economic ties between the two countries. The conclusion highlights possible problem areas that might emerge between Turkey and Russia and explains why "quasi-alliances" or "axes" between Turkey and Russia seem quite unlikely in the near future.

The Diminishing Threat Perceptions

History has been more than generous with both Turkey and Russia providing them enough opportunities to create mutually held "enemy" images. Thus, it is impossible to talk about relations between Turkey and Russia without the role of "perceptions" (Bazoğlu Sezer 1992: 227; 2000: 62; Harris 1995: 3; Ogan 2004: 98; Hill and Taşpınar 2006: 81). Though mutually held threat perceptions originated in the period in which both countries were empires, the discord between Turkey and the Soviet Union at the end of World War II also was crucial for the creation of the "enemy" image and a sprawling "enemy" discourse. The Soviet demands for Turkish territory and basing rights in the Turkish Straits at the end of World War II not only forced Turkey to choose sides and attach itself to the Western security system, but also led to the labeling of the Soviet Union as a source of threat. After the initial tension, and several other ups and downs in political relations, Turkey and the Soviet Union nevertheless managed to strike a working relation in the later years of the Cold War, especially in economic terms. But, as a result of the ongoing Cold War, this perception of the Soviet Union as a source of threat stayed attached to this country.

When the Cold War was coming to an end, both Turkey and Russia had very high expectations of a "strategic partnership" (Nadein-Ravesky 1999: 174). In the agreements signed just before and after the dissolution

of the Soviet Union, in March 1991 and May 1992, respectively, both sides envisioned great deal of cooperation in different areas (Tellal 2001: 547). Initially Russia even welcomed Turkey's interest towards the newly independent Turkic republics. But this was a very short-lived honeymoon period. The institutionalization of Russia's "near abroad policy" through Russian Foreign Policy Concept and Military Doctrine, in February and May 1993, led Turkey and Russia to be rivals rather than partners in Eurasia (Tuncer 2000, 440-447).

This rivalry that amplified mutual threat perceptions stemmed from several different yet interrelated issues:[1] Turkey's ties to the Turkic republics in the former Soviet Union; debates regarding the extraction and especially the transportation of the energy resources of the Caspian basin; Russia's military might and muscle flexing, which Turkey saw as a threat; and mutual accusations of harboring and supporting ethnic separatism. Until the late 1990s, all of these factors enforced and reinforced the threat perceptions that both countries held against each other. Political normalization between Turkey and Russia could only begin after the elimination of most of the issues feeding these mutual threat perceptions.

Turkey's Ties with the Turkic Republics and The "Turkish Model"

For some Turkish officials, the emergence of the Turkic Republics as newly independent states after the collapse of the Soviet Union was a once-in-a-millennium opportunity to establish ties with the "forgotten cousins." These ties with the Turkic republics would not only provide Turkey and Turkish entrepreneurs with ample business opportunities but, in addition, would be a reevaluation of its foreign policy at the end of the Cold War. American policy makers supported Turkey in this process thinking that in the vacuum created by the elimination of the communist ideology these newly independent countries could be susceptible to radical religious influences from Iran and thus Turkey with is "Muslim, yet secular and democratic" model would be a better alternative (Winrow 1998a: 91).

For Russia, however, after 1993, the "Turkish Model," or any kind of Turkish involvement in the region meant the expansion not only of the Turkish sphere of influence but also the American one. Furthermore, the Russians were worried that the "Turkish Model" could find sympathetic ears within Russia's own Muslim population, threatening Russia's

own unity (Zagorski 1999: 63). Despite Turkey's denial of pan-Turkism from the beginning, Turkey's slogan, model and its interests in the region had caused Russia to consider Turkey as a threat.

However, many projections made in the early years following the Cold War were proven incorrect. One such projection was the rivalry between Turkey and Iran in Central Asia (Hunter 2003: 133). But more important than that, the projection that the "new century would be the century of the Turks, from the Adriatic Sea to the Chinese Wall"[2] never materialized. Simply put, Turkey was far from being a model. It lacked the resources to be a locomotive country. As a result of an overconfident and unrealistic foreign policy based on supposed ethnic and linguistic commonality and unmet promises, the Turkic republics started to distance themselves from Turkey (Carley 1995: 169-197; Aydın 2004: 6). In other words, by the mid 1990s, it became clear that Turkey had neither the means nor the facilities to create a sphere of influence in the region, as initially was projected. So, starting from the early 2000s, Turkish foreign policy towards the Turkic Republics became one of applying pragmatic policies that primarily protected the economic interests of the Turkish entrepreneurs in the region (Robbins 2003: 271).[3] But, nevertheless, even the attempt to forge ties with the "Turkic cousins" was enough for Russia to see Turkey as a threat to its own survival right up to mid to late 1990s.

Caspian Basin, Energy Resources and Pipelines

The Russian "near abroad" was not the only element that reinforced mutual threat perceptions, in the 1990s. The development and particularly the transportation of energy resources in the Caspian Basin became another element of competition between Turkey and Russia (as well as the United States). While western oil companies rushed the region to get involved in the extraction of oil and gas resources, some observers in the United States, very optimistically, regarded the oil reserves, which were then estimated to be as large as those in the Persian Gulf, as a chance to reduce American dependency on Middle Eastern oil. Another optimistic American assumption was that the proceeds from these resources would bring wealth and thus democracy to the region, allowing these countries to stand on their feet and consequently be less dependent on Russia (Cohen 1997; Richardson 1999; Morningstar 1999).

Two major problems emerged regarding these optimistic assumptions. First, the Caspian Basin, far from containing as much oil as the Persian Gulf, had reserves that at most equaled those in the North Sea (The Economist 1998; Manning 2000; Jaffe and Manning 1998-1999; Olcott 1998).[4] Second, transporting oil to the world markets became a problem in its own right, requiring the construction or improvement of various pipelines. Countries neighboring the Caspian Basin proposed or espoused different routes passing through their own territories, thus exacerbating the race for sphere of influence, the so-called "Great Game," in the region (The Economist, 1992). Turkey proposed a pipeline that would run from the Azerbaijani capital of Baku to the Turkish Mediterranean port of Ceyhan. This pipeline was to be constructed as an alternative to the existing pipeline routes running from Baku to the Russian port of Novorossiisk and the Georgian port of Supsa. Afraid of losing its monopoly and thus influence in the region, Russia argued fiercely that existing pipelines were enough to transport the region's oil to world markets (Jonson 2001: 95)

Turkey objected to Russia, ostensibly on environmental grounds, saying that super-tankers loaded with oil from the Novorossiisk and Supsa would not only clog the traffic in the already overcrowded Turkish Straits, but would also increase the possibility of an accident that could obliterate Istanbul (Nadein-Raevsky 1999: 177). The dispute between Turkey and Russia regarding Turkish Straits worsened when the Turkish authorities introduced a new set of regulations in November 1998. Though this was a much diluted form of the 1994 regulations that Turkey attempted to use, Russians claimed that it meant the modification of the Montreux Convention of 1936 that secured free passage of merchant ships through the Turkish Straits during peacetime. This modification, which allowed only one large tanker to pass at a time and let others wait at the entrance of the Straits raised objections and complaints from the Russians claiming that Turkey deliberately extended wait times for Russian tankers, thereby increasing the cost of transporting Russian oil to world markets (Akgün and Aydın 1999, 52-64; Schleifer 2005). But Turkey stood firm for the regulation of traffic in the Straits and made it known that this applied to everyone, thus making the Straits less and less of an issue between Turkey and Russia (Anatolia 2001).

However, in the 1990s, the Russians were not the only party objecting the Baku-Ceyhan pipeline. Major energy companies were as

adamant as Russia in their objection. Global oil prices that approached record lows between 1990 and 1998 simply did not justify the construction of a new pipeline in the region, making energy companies unwilling to be financially involved in the construction of Baku-Ceyhan. (Akgün and Aydın 1999:85) Yet the insistence of the Turkish and American governments eventually overcame both Russian objection and the unwillingness of Western oil companies, saving the pipeline from a possible derailment. Finally, at the OSCE (Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe) Summit held in Istanbul in November 1999, Russia dropped its objections thus clearing the way for the construction of the Baku-Ceyhan pipeline, which was subsequently renamed the Baku-Tblisi-Ceyhan (BTC) and became operational in 2006, after five years of construction. Although Turkey's "danger in the Straits" argument made sense, Turks certainly were more interested in the Baku-Tblisi-Ceyhan pipeline for reasons other than environmental. Meeting Turkey's growing energy needs was one such reason. But more importantly, being part of the East-West energy network and thus having a say in the region's affairs was what really mattered more for Turkey. Yet with the end of Russian objection one other element that spurred threat perceptions was dropped from the agenda of Turkey-Russia relations.

Accusations of Harboring and Supporting Ethnic Separatism

Ethnic separatism was also an issue that increased the tension between Turkey and Russia until the late 1990s. These accusations were mutual. Turkey accused Russia of sheltering members of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) and Russia accused Turkey of turning a blind eye on the activities of the pro-Chechen Caucasian diaspora living in Turkey. In harboring pro-PKK elements the Russian Duma turned out to be more "welcoming" than the Russian government: the "Kurdish Parliament in exile" convened in a building that belonged to the Duma; the Duma helped organize two conferences on the Kurdish issue; in 1997, it accused Turkey of committing "genocide" against the Kurds and finally it called for granting asylum to PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan (Tellal 2001: 546; Akgün and Aydın 1999:26).

Turkey's involvement in the Chechen issue was multifold. First, Russia claimed that the separatists in Chechnya were receiving financial support from various Muslim countries, including Turkey. Second, Russian authorities were infuriated when Turkish nationals (usually of

Caucasian origin) were captured fighting alongside the Chechen separatists against the Russian troops in Chechnya. Third, the Russians argued that Turkey had failed to properly punish the hijackers of a Turkish boat, Avrasya, in 1996 and (later two commercial planes in 1991 and 2001 and raiders of the Swissotel in 2001 in Istanbul), all supposedly, in "support" of Chechen independence (Tellal 2001: 545; Hürriyet 2001). It was not just the attitude of the Turkish state that bothered the Russian authorities. They also found the lenient approach of the Turkish media towards the hijackers quite troubling (Kireyev 2003: 211-213). The Kurdish and Chechen issues became less of a dispute between Turkey and Russia after Turkey and Russia signed several counterterrorism agreements and exchanged lists of suspects in an effort to crack down on the illegal activities of pro-Chechen and pro-Kurdish organizations in their respective countries. But despite all these and despite Ankara's insistence, and much of its dismay, Moscow has refrained from recognizing PKK as a terrorist organization in order not to upset the Kurds who have started to become a force in Middle Eastern politics (Kınıklıoğlu 2006: 84).

Military Power: From Fear to Cooperation

The mutual threat perceptions between Turkey and Russia also stemmed from the supposed military superiority of the other side. Several events and issues increased the tension and perception of military threat among the Turkish elites and almost all of them were related to the Russian presence in the Caucasus. In 1992, when, for example, at the height of the Nagarno-Karabagh war Turkish officials openly aired the possibility of intervening in the war, Russian Marshal Shaposhnikov warned Turkey that this might "lead to World War III" (Bazoğlu Sezer 2000: 65). Similarly, the Russian bases in Armenia and Georgia along with the security agreement that Russia signed with Armenia have caused Turkey to look at Russia with a great deal of suspicion (Robbins 2003: 169). In the early 1990s, the Russian presence in Armenia reinforced perceptions of mutual threat that prevailed in Turkey and Armenia. Furthermore, the Russian presence in Georgia was seen as something that could hinder the construction of the Baku-Tblisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline (Larrabee and Lesser 2003: 113-15) Only in 2002, could the Turkish Chief of Staff finally say that Turkey no longer saw the Russian presence in Georgia as a threat (Interfax 2002).

The other major factor increasing the Turkish perception of threat coming from Russia was the Conventional Forces in Europe Treaty (CFE). Signed in 1990, before the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Treaty envisioned conventional arms limitation in Eurasia. However, the ethnic wars that flared up in the Caucasus and the Russian involvement in these wars forced Russia its needs for arms in this region. In September 1993, Russia declared that it would not be fulfilling the terms of the CFE Treaty. Russian reluctance to its obligations alarmed Turkey who thought that Russia's military presence especially in the Caucasus was a way to reclaim its sphere of influence in that region (Akgün and Aydın 1999: 20). Eventually Turkey, mostly as a result of Western insistence, had to agree on a reformulated CFE Treaty, approved at the OSCE Summit in Istanbul in 1999, making the CFE Treaty a non-issue between Turkey and Russia (Robbins 2003: 21-23). The only tension-increasing event that was not related to the Caucasus was the sale of S-300 missiles to the Greek Cypriots in 1996. Turkey claimed this would disturb the balances in the region forced the missiles to be diverted to Greece (Akgün and Aydın 1999: 24-25).

Russia, on the other hand, despite being a former superpower, also saw Turkey as a military threat. In the early 1990s, Russia was "worried but not alarmed" to quote Zagorski, because, while Russia as a military power was suffering from the adverse effects of the collapse of the Soviet Union, Turkey's military power (and thus possibly its influence) was growing. For example, in the early 1990s, the Germans and Americans transferred their excess military equipment to Turkey through the NATO Cascade Program. To make the Russian threat perceptions worse, at the same time, the Turkish army started its modernization program (Zagorski 1999: 66). In addition to both these factors, Russia perceived the Turkish naval presence in the Black Sea as a threat (Bazoğlu Sezer 2000: 65; Rossisyskaya Gazeta 1996; Itar-Tass 1996).

Yet in the midst of these mutual perceptions of threat, both countries took the first step towards military cooperation. In October 1993, Russia and Turkey signed an agreement allowing the sale of armored combat vehicles to Turkey, making Turkey the first NATO country to buy Russian military equipment. This agreement was the result of sheer pragmatism, fully in line with a Russian Military Doctrine of 1993, which approved the sale of military equipment to finance its operations (Tellal 2001: 542). Russia needed cash to keep its military-industrial

complex going, and Turkey, who had been turned down by Western countries for violating human rights in Eastern Turkey, needed military equipment. In addition to the military equipment that Russia provided to Turkey, since the late 1990s, the Russians, have frequently expressed interest in selling combat helicopters, and various other military equipment and know-how to Turkey (Itar-Tass 1997; Enginsoy and Bekdil 2005). Though this deal has not yet materialized, in 1998, 2000, 2002 and 2004, Russia and Turkey signed other agreements promising further military cooperation (Itar-Tass 1998, 2002; Ogan 2006; Dünya 2004).

The real breakthrough in military sense was in the Black Sea. In April 2001, Russia and Turkey joined forces with other Black Sea countries and established the BLACKSEAFOR. The BLACKSEAFOR was intended to be a "task group" to undertake humanitarian search and rescue missions, environmental protection in the Black Sea, and good will visits (Çiftçi 2005: 171-172). Later in 2004, in the aftermath of 9/11, Turkey took the initiative of launching Operation Black Sea Harmony to patrol the Black Sea for potentially suspicious ships. Russia joined this initiative in December 2006. But, more importantly, in 2006, Turkey and Russia twice joined forces to oppose two American proposals. The first one was the inclusion of the United States in the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC), an organization which was established in 1992 and remained mostly dormant since then, as an observer (Hill and Taşpınar 2006a: 10). The second was the extension of NATO led Operation Active Endeavor into the Black Sea (Kınıklıoğlu 2006: 88-89: Cohen and Irwin 2006).

While both Turkey and Russia argued that BLACKSEAFOR and Operation Black Sea Harmony were enough to accomplish the tasks of Active Endeavor in the Black Sea, and that extending the mandate would create redundancy in the Black Sea, Turkey was more concerned that NATO, or the presence of ships belonging to non-riparian states would require modification of the Montreux Convention, which allows Turkey to maintain control over the Turkish Straits (Interfax 2005; Turkish Daily News 2006). Russian authorities, on the other hand, argued that Black Sea security is a "domestic affair" and thus should be taken care of by the states that have coast to the Black Sea (Agentstvo Voyennyky Novostey 2006). In other words, the Turkish objection was more of a concern that the presence of foreign ships in the Black Sea would open a whole can of worms regarding the Montreux Treaty, while Russian

refusal to let NATO forces into the Black Sea was due to the increased American presence in post 9/11 Eurasia.

In addition to this perceptional shift, several observers have claimed that the discontent with American policies has created a group within the Turkish military that is sympathetic to Russia and Russian might (Kınıklıoğlu 2006: 83; Çongar in Düzel 2007). A possible example of this sympathy was displayed when Russian President Putin's "not-so-diplomatic" speech at the Munich Security Conference was posted immediately on the Turkish General Chief of Staff's website in February 2007 (Milliyet 2007).

So overall, in terms of military threat perceptions Turkey and Russia went from an elevated level of threat to almost no threat. [5] Yet it is hard to claim that the evolution of this perception relates only to their interaction at the international level. It is important to consider the internal dynamics of these countries and how their respective National Security or Foreign Policy Concepts redefined the issues that constituted a threat to these countries. This kind of change was most obvious in Turkey. When the Turkish National Security Concept was reformulated in 1997, for the first time since the end of the Cold War, threats stemming from radical Islam and Kurdish separatism were placed at the top. Thus internal threats started to occupy a much more important place in Turkish threat formulation than external ones. And, among the external threats, Russia was not "the threat," but rather, Turkey's neighbors to the south and southwest (Kaya 2005: 222-223). A similar change also took place in Russia. In 1993, for example, the protection of Russian interests in the "near abroad" was a priority. In 2000, the Foreign Policy Concept stated that the pursuit of development of Russian economic interests in the international arena would become one of the most important priorities of Putin's Russia. This meant an additional spur for the economic ties between Turkey and Russia, that had already approached record levels after the end of the Cold War.

The Politics of Economics

Throughout the 1990s, while political tensions were running high between Russia and Turkey, economically everything just seemed excellent. However, it would be totally wrong to attribute this increased economic activity to the collapse of the Soviet Union. With the exception of approximately a twenty-year period from the start of World War

II till the mid 1960s, Turkey's economic ties with the Soviet Union had always been good (Selçuk 2005). During the height of the Cold War, Turkey not only received generous Soviet loans on easy terms to undertake various industrial projects, it also became one of the most important recipients of Soviet aid among developing countries (Bazoğlu Sezer 1985: 121). In other words, economic normalization had already started to take place between the two during the Cold War, despite the absence of political normalization. This paved the way for the post-Cold War boost in economic activity.

In addition to the agreements signed in the 1960s and the 1970s, the 1984 natural gas deal signed between Turkey and Soviet Union, was the most crucial step boosting post Cold War economic activity between Turkey and Russia. In essence, the agreement was a barter agreement opening the doors of the Soviet market as well as the lucrative post-Soviet market to the Turkish entrepreneurs. From 1988 on, the Soviet Union agreed that Turkey could pay 70% of the Soviet gas it received by exporting goods and services to the Soviet Union. Through this agreement Turkish contractors started to access the Soviet market, particularly the construction sector, just as the Soviet Union was collapsing. As a result, the trade volume between Turkey and the Soviet Union moved from around 410 million dollars in 1980 to 1.7 billion dollars, in 1989, just a year after the new payment method was launched. (Selçuk 2005: 54-55). This increasing economic activity led to the establishment of the Turkish-Soviet Business Council, which became Turkish-Russia Business Council after the collapse of the Soviet Union (Günver Turan 2003: 281). In other words, while the recent economic boom was state-initiated, the business community then took the lead to initiate further extension of the business ties to the rest of Eurasia (Larrabee and Lesser 2003: xiii).

In this sense, the Blue Stream Pipeline displayed both the power of the business lobbies as well as the Turkish elite's desire to make Turkey an energy hub. Though from the outside the Blue Stream was an example of cooperation to deliver natural gas, before and after its construction the pipeline was mired with corruption and controversy, demonstrating the power of business lobbies both in Turkey and Russia and their ability to influence the political decision-making process in Turkey (Winrow 2003: 89-90; Bacik 2001: 91; Winrow 2004).

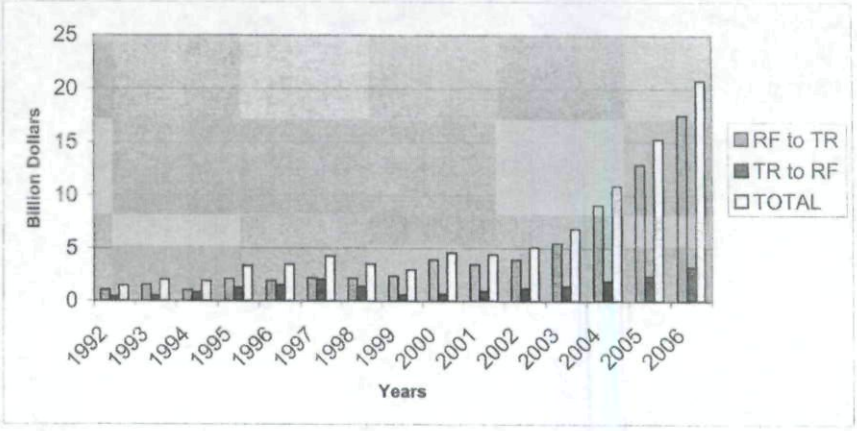
These controversies surrounding the Blue Stream pipeline, however, have not impeded plans for further cooperation in this area. During the mutual visits in 2004 and 2005, for example, Russian and Turkish officials discussed various such projects involving natural gas, as constructing a natural gas depot under Tuz Gölü in Turkey, the possible delivery of Russian gas to Israel and Southern Europe, and possible Russian involvement in Turkish gas distribution networks (Ürey 2004; Taşpınar and Demirtaş 2004). The sale and transportation of the energy resources of Eurasia are a blessing for Russia, and Turkey has become one of the countries best suited for Russia's purposes—first as a consumer and then as the recent discussions between Russian and Turkish official indicate, possibly, as a transit country for the Eurasian gas to energy hungry countries to the south of Turkey. Naturally, this has not been a one-way transaction. Since the mid 1990s, even when BTC was in the planning stage, Turkey has been aspiring to become an energy hub in the region. Furthermore, when it was revealed that Turkey had contracted for more gas than it needed (due to corruption, misplanning etc.,) finding a way to dispose of the excess gas became one of Turkey's goals.

More and More Business:
Trade, Shuttle Trade and Mutual Investment

Of course, natural gas is not the only trade item between Turkey and Russia, but it has become and still is the key to the trade between them. First, as explained above, it helped Turkish businessmen take root in the Russian business scene. Second, after the inauguration of Blue Stream, despite all the controversy it has caused, natural gas has become the most important trade item helping trade volumes to skyrocket between Turkey and Russia.

Figure 1 shows that in 1980, the total volume of trade between Turkey and the Soviet Union was only 361 million dollars (Akgün and Aydın 1999: 110). It increased to approximately 1.5 billion dollars, in 1992, and in 2006, with almost a twenty-fold increase, reached 20.7 billion dollars. The boost that came after 2003 as a result of the natural gas delivered through Blue Stream is also apparent in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Trade Between Turkey and Russia: Imports, Exports and the Total Volume, 1992-2006



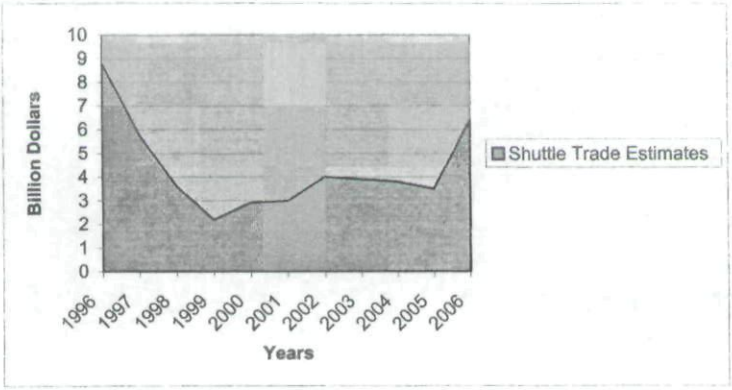
Source: Turkish Undersecretary For Foreign Trade available at http://www.dtm.gov.tr/dtmweb/index.cfm?action=detayrk&yayinID=1116&icerikID=1225&dil=TR

Russian natural gas not only increased the volume of trade between Turkey and Russia, but because of its sheer amount has also started to create a negative trade balance for Turkey. The Russians claim that there is no such negative balance because the trade numbers do not include revenue generated by shuttle traders, investments of the Turkish enterprises in Russia, and the Russian tourists coming to Turkey. This claim can be considered partially correct. Despite fluctuations, every year, shuttle trade brings billions of dollars to Turkey. For example, between 1996, the first year that the Turkish Central Bank started to keep an estimate on shuttle trade, and 2006, shuttle traders coming from all of the former Soviet Union countries exported more than 40 billion dollars worth of goods from Turkey (Sabah 2005; Takvim 2007).

There are multiple reasons behind the fluctuations seen in shuttle trading. The most important reason is the August 1998 crisis in Russia that severely decreased the purchasing power of Russian traders and the Russian people. The emergence of cheaper alternatives such as China, the United Arab Emirates etc., has also diverted the attention of shuttle traders away from Turkey. Finally, Russia, due to pressure from the IMF

changed its customs regulations thereby limiting shuttle trade (Selçuk 2005: 61). Nevertheless, though it is hard to discern the exact direction of the goods shuttled to the rest of the former Soviet Union and despite the ups and downs shuttle trade was and still continues to be an important source of revenue for Turkey.

Figure 2: Shuttle Trade Estimates, 1996-2006



Source: Turkish Central Bank Estimates cited in Selçuk 2005: 60; Sabah 2005 and Takvim 2007.

More important than trade are the mutual investments and contracts that both Turkish and Russian businessmen see as real revenue-generators. With the 1984 natural gas agreement Turkish businesspeople were among the first to undertake various projects and investments in Russia. Between, between 1989 and 2005, Turkish construction companies, undertook 14.7 billion dollars worth of projects in the Russian Federation and Turkish investments there in recent years are estimated to be around 1.5 billion dollars (Turkrus.com 2006; DEİK 2005: 17). Russian businesspeople, are latecomers to the Turkish business scene, but, their increasing presence is being felt. Russian investments in Turkey between 1995 and 1998 were only 12.5 million dollars (Kazgan 2003: 168). By 2005, there were 219 Russian owned firms operating in Turkey (Taş 2005) and before the Russian Alpha Group's 3.3 billion dollars purchase of 13% of Turkcell (Turkey's largest mobile phone operator),

Russian investments in Turkey were estimated at 300 to 350 million dollars (Putin 2005), most of it, not surprisingly in the tourism sector.[6] Russian tourists have become one of the most crucial elements of the economic activity between Turkey and Russia. Since the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Russians, in increasing numbers, have made the Turkish Mediterranean coast their vacation destination. In 1999, 438,000 Russian tourists came to Turkey; the number for 2005 was 1.9 million (Selçuk 2005: 63; Kınıklıoğlu 2006: 91). Overall, economic factors, which were quite independent of the political situation, have become the driving force in the rapprochement between Russia and Turkey, enabling these countries to call each other "partners."

Russian foreign policy perceptions changed further when Vladimir Putin came to power in August 1999. His arrival meant that Russia's economic interests would become one of the pillars of Russian foreign policy. This reevaluation of priorities was due to two important factors. First, Putin's belief that "citizens' happiness," in other words, improvement of the social conditions in the country is very much connected to overall improvement in economic conditions especially through the development of foreign economic ties of Russia (Putin 2004). Second, Putin linked Russia's power as a global player to the economic conditions and economic relations of the country (Charap 2004: 57; Trenin 2003/04: 77). As Lo argues, Putin was clever enough to realize the important correlation between "geoeconomics" and "geopolitics," and put this idea into practice (Lo 2002: 52, 65-69). Given all this bilateral economic activity, it is no wonder that 25 billion dollars is the target trade volume of both Turkish and Russian officials (Bigg 2005).

Conclusion

Writing in the early 2000s, Bazoğlu Sezer defined the relationship between Turkey and Russia as one of "virtual rapprochement" (Bazoğlu Sezer 2000: 62). This meant that there was a consensus to cooperate, but, there was also "mutual fear, mistrust and suspicion" between the two countries. Today, however, it is clear that Turkey and Russia have managed to take their relationship to a much higher level than it was at the end of the Cold War. It is also true that Russia and Turkey have managed to shed the mutual perceptions of threat and normalize both their political and economic ties. But, have they been able to experience

the most necessary element for a "coupling," "quasi-alliance"—can they trust each other? That is one question that needs to be answered.

There are several issues, which might prove to be dealmakers, or deal-breakers in the bond between Turkey and Russia, possibly, defining the "virtualness" and the "realness" of what Winrow (1998b: 98) calls a "multifaceted and complex" relationship. The crucial issues are Cyprus; future cooperation in energy transportation projects; and the Black Sea.

In the past Turkey has tried to get Russian support on the resolution of the Cyprus conflict. So far, this much expected Russian support has not gone beyond equivocal and diplomatic statements calling for a peaceful resolution of the conflict. The Russian unwillingness to support Turkey in Cyprus is mostly due to Russia's economic ties with this country. Cyprus is an offshore heaven for Russian companies and Russian arms are the preferred choice of the Greek Cypriot authorities. Indeed, Russia showed its support for the Greek Cypriots in 2004, when it vetoed a draft resolution on Cyprus at the UN Security Council in 2004, which Greek Cypriots thought could influence the outcome referendum to unify the island (Felgenhauer 2004: Torbakov 2004).

Leaving aside Cyprus, future cooperation in energy projects will be crucial in determining the course of relations between Turkey and Russia. Russia has been very willing to cooperate with Turkey in natural gas deliveries and transportation, something that fits squarely with Turkey's desire to become an energy hub in the region. However, that has not been the case for oil transportation. Samsun-Ceyhan pipeline is a case in point. Despite the insistence of Turkish government's and some Turkish companies' to carry Russian crude from Samsun to Ceyhan, in 2007, Russia has opted for a 285 km Trans-Balkan Pipeline, running from Burgas in Bulgaria to Alexandroupolis in Greece. Moreover, in May 2007, the Russians also unveiled a new natural gas pipeline that will carry Turkmen gas to the West, again threatening the development of the previously discussed ways of delivering natural gas to the countries to the west and south of Turkey (Zaman 2007). All these show that Turkey's ability to become an energy corridor is very much dependent on the terms dictated by Russia. Similarly, Turkey's dependency on Russian gas might create problems in the future. Though this dependency is mutual—one side needs to sell and the other side needs to buy—it is no secret that Russia has used gas deliveries as a weapon and will not hesitate to do so in the future. So far, there have been no problems with gas

deliveries to Turkey—with the exception of gas coming via the Balkans in January 2006 because of Russia's dispute with Ukraine. But with Turkey now getting 60% of its natural gas from Russia, natural gas could become a weapon, upsetting the bilateral ties that took a decade to improve.

Finally, though recent rapprochement between Turkey and Russia is blamed on mutual discontent with the American policies, one should keep in mind that historically even during the height of the Cold War, troubles or disagreement with the United States at different times, has pushed Turkey closer to Russia. The United States is a rival for Russia. This is not the case for Turkey. Though US-Turkey relations are going through a tumultuous period due to developments in Iraq, the United States and Turkey, since the end of the Cold War, have been allies, through thick and thin. So the "coupling" that some observers have indicated between Turkey and Russia might indeed be temporary.

At the moment Turkey is consumed by domestic troubles and by the task of turning its European dream into a reality. It is likely to be occupied with these issues for the foreseeable future, but has still managed to "normalize" its ties, politically and economically, with Russia—one of the great powers of the world that desires a more enhanced role in Eurasia. Turkey is simply a partner, trying to make the most out of Russia's recent "economic pragmatism,"[7] and will likely to play the same role in the near future.

Notes

1. For an expanded "checklist" please see Bazoğlu Sezer (2001).

2. There has been a debate as to who first came up with this slogan. Gün Kut argues that it was the American foreign policy elite who came up with this rather than the Turks. See Gün Kut, "Yeni Türk Cumhuriyetleri ve Uluslararası Ortam," in Büşra Ersanlı Behar et al., eds., *Bagımsızlığın İlk Yılları* (Ankara: T.C. Kültür Bakanlığı Yayınları, 1994), p.13, fn. 6.

3. This, especially, was evident in 2005 during "uprisings" in Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan. See for example, Arslan, Elif Ünal. 2005. "No Appetite for Central Asia," *Turkish Daily News*, 22 May and *Radikal*, 2005. "Türklere Saldırı," 26 March.

4. *The Economist* in 1998 gave an estimate that ranged "from a conservative 70 billion barrels of oil to wildly optimistic 200 billion barrels or more," "Oil Drums Calling," 7 February.

5. These decreasing threat perceptions were also reflected in a public opinion survey taken in Turkey in October 2004. Among those who were polled only 3.5% said that they saw Russia as a threat for Turkey, ranking it well behind the United States, Greece, Armenia, Israel, the United King-

dom and Greek Cypriots. See, *ISRO 2. Foreign Policy Perception Survey, October 2004,* available at http://www.turkishweekly.net/survey-tfpps.pdf.

6. It is hard to detect the exact amount of Russian investments in Turkey because Russian investors either prefer to use Turkish partners or some have "shady" ties (Kınıklıoğlu 2006: 86).

7. I owe this term to DEİK officials. Interview with DEİK officials, Istanbul, February 17, 2006.

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